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The Gift of  
G. Wymberley-Jones,  
M.D.,  
of Wommsloe,  
near Savannah,  
Georgia,  
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1849.





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# OBSERVATIONS

ON

*By*  
DOCTOR STEVENS'S

# HISTORY OF GEORGIA.

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"What overgrown piece of lumber have we here? cried the curate."

DON QUIXOTE.

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SAVANNAH:

MDCCCLXIX.

~~12342.7~~

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1849, No. 8

Gift of George Wymberley-Jones, M.D.  
of Wormsloe, near Savannah, Georgia.

OBSERVATIONS  
ON  
DOCTOR STEVENS'S  
HISTORY OF GEORGIA.

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A History of Georgia, from its first Discovery by Europeans, to the Adoption of the present Constitution, MDCCXVIII. By Rev. William Bacon Stevens, M.D., Professor of Belles Lettres, History, etc., in the University of Georgia, Athens. In two volumes. Vol. I. New York, 1847. 8vo. pp. 608.

THE Preface of this book announces that it was undertaken in the year 1841, and that every facility has been afforded for its composition, both by the Historical Society, and by private individuals.

The title-page proclaims its author to be a Professor of Belles Lettres and History, and fixes the date of its publication in the year 1847.

Thus the inferences that it is accurate in statement and correct in style, are only not suggested. Six years would give ample time for frequent and deliberate revisions, for the rectification of mistakes

committed in haste, or through negligence, and for the removal of any redundancies or improprieties of language. Six years did elapse between the commencement and publication.

The natural conclusion from the preliminary parade of the author's advantages is, that he has availed himself of them; that the volume which he "presents" (for and in consideration of the sum of two dollars and fifty cents per copy) to "*his beloved state*, as an offering of *first fruits*\*" from the harvest of her past memorials,"† is, what it ought to be. Nor is there any disclaimer offered to repress such a conclusion. There is not the slightest appearance of a modest diffidence of his own abilities, not a

\* Three pages before this (Preface, p. ix.), we find Doctor Stevens writing thus: "Entering a field of enquiry which *has been reaped by four predecessors*, I could scarcely expect to do more than *glean here and there a sheaf which the sickle had spared*, or the reaper neglected." As they now stand, these two declarations are directly contradictory. One of them must be untrue,—or perhaps he has only put the cart before the horse. The figure of reaping, &c., is stale enough,—Doctor Stevens, with an originality quite ingenious, turns it topsy-turvy. He begins by *gleaning* with the humility of a Ruth *after the reapers*, and ends with *gathering the whole harvest*, and offering "the first fruits" "to his beloved state," Georgia. Poor Georgia! hers is a woman's name, hers has been a woman's fate! Trusting—yielding—deserted! To the empty mouth that gave her empty professions she returned abundance of food, and seated ignorance in the chair of learning. But what in the recipient of her generosity was ungrateful abandonment, has been for Georgia a happy deliverance.

† Preface, p. xii.

single admission of imperfection, not a doubt as to the adequacy of his powers to his work, not a hint of a possibility of its not being immaculate.

The tone of the Preface is that of presumptuous egotism; the rest of the work is marked by shallowness and incapacity. We looked for "a thing of life," and behold an abortion! for comeliness, and behold a monster! It is put forward, too, with a pert confidence worthy of the hero of nursery renown:—

" Little Jack Horner sat in the corner,  
Eating a Christmas pie:  
He put in his thumb, and he took out a plum,  
And said 'WHAT A GOOD BOY AM I!'"

Indeed a serene self-satisfaction pervades the whole performance. If anything were wanting to complete the absurdity of the book, this would do it. Self-conceit is ridiculous, and impotence is ridiculous; but united in such proportions as this book exhibits—both in such monstrous development—O rare! For a man to talk nonsense is bad enough; but to talk nonsense with the air of one uttering wisdom—vanity can carry folly no farther.

With equal self-approbation, and equal unconsciousness of the fantastic figure she cut, did Madge Wildfire lead good little Jeanie Deans up the church

aisle before the amazed congregation. But—poor Madge was crazed.

The Preface contains no apology for defects, but it gives a reason for introducing this miserable bantling of a meretricious muse to our notice. It declares the work was written to supply the want, long felt, of a history of Georgia. The deficiency truly has been remedied. The gap has been filled up. But how? Rags have been stuffed into the broken window, and the hole is no longer open. The tempest is kept out, but so is the light.

Yet perhaps 'tis rather fortunate for the Historical Society that this book has proved a failure. Were it what it assumes to be, it would have necessarily covered the whole ground, and rendered the future labours of the Society works of supererogation.\* Nothing would have remained for that respectable association to do, but to hold meetings and elect members. The main purpose of its formation being accomplished, there would have been little use in the protraction of a feeble and languishing existence.

The completion of an accurate and well-written history of Georgia will necessarily be a finishing stroke to the Society. It will be the fulfilment of its function. If, however, it should survive that event, and still linger on, it must degenerate from

\* See Appendix.

the dignity of a Society down to a mere club of Jonathan Oldbucks.

With this view, we regard the failure of this book as its chiefest merit; the Society being thereby relieved from an unpleasant and probably unforeseen predicament—a position of uselessness and insignificance.

Certainly Doctor Stevens's work can never cause such a deplorable catastrophe. Instead of a history, it is a sort of historical patchwork, in which the pieces about Georgia are rather more numerous than the others. It abounds, too, in errors as to fact, which in the course of our remarks we shall endeavour to expose; and shall not hesitate to rebuke; and is also distinguished for a style so grandiloquent, so preposterous, so pompous, so corrupt, so grotesquely incongruous with the simplicity of the subject, that every attempt we have made to give it serious consideration has ended in a hearty fit of laughter. It is difficult to condemn what is so delightfully absurd. We have a kindness for its very faults—they have afforded us so much merriment. It is too ridiculous for contempt—we laugh and pity.

The big words about little things—the ambitious diction, not unfrequently rising into nonsense—the “laboured nothings” lavished with indiscriminate



profusion upon the most trivial occasions—all remind us irresistibly of the issue of the famous labour—

“Parturiunt montes, nascetur ridiculus mus.”

It is indeed very funny to observe how every subject which affords the slightest opening for a burst of impassioned loquacity, is relentlessly tortured into some relation with the history of Georgia—how the meagre theme of our early annals has been expanded into a volume competent to contain an ancient empire's story—how the simple, dry details have been bedizened with rhetorical decorations, like an old, enduring dowager's withered phiz set about with flowers, till we are revolted at a contrast which makes dryness seem drier, ugliness more hideous, and even bloom repulsive.

But not even this is quite so amusing as the self-satisfaction evinced throughout the book, the triumphant air with which the nonsense is produced, and the conviction, everywhere apparent, that this “fine writing” will achieve for the author his coveted literary immortality.

The frequent repetition of these tropes and figures, however, diminishes the amusement to be derived from them; they cease to be diverting, and become tiresome. The reader is at last fatigued by the eternal glitter, though it be but the glitter of tinsel,

and he is palled and sickened by the exuberant flow of an insipid and ornate twaddle.

Mr. Diedrich Knickerbocker commences his celebrated History of New York with an account of the creation of the world—his first book “containing divers ingenious theories and philosophic speculations concerning the creation and population of the world, as connected with the history of New York.”

Doctor Stevens has not sufficient hardihood to ascend to quite so remote a period, but contents himself with beginning with the discovery of America. He accordingly devotes his first book to an account of early voyages to the southern coast generally, and of settlements in *Florida* and *South Carolina*; diversified by digressions which carry him as far South as the ruins of Central America, and into discussions respecting their probable origin and the character of the inscriptions upon them; in the course of which we are indulged with a good deal of stuff about Echo—gigantic columns—halls of banqueting—silent chambers—Shemitic art—and so forth. All of which, digressions about Central America, narratives of Spanish settlements in Florida, and of French settlements in Carolina, no doubt throw great light on the history of Georgia!

This first book also contains a short notice of

the Indians; which, from the minutiae introduced into it, would seem to be the result of contemporary observation, if not the offspring of imagination. "They lived," says our author,\* "in their native wildness, amid the sublime solitudes of America; now hunting the timid deer—now paddling the birch canoe—now dancing at their simple festivals—now going forth, painted and plumed for battle—or now, gathered around their council fires, to the grave debates of chiefs and warriors." And he might have gone on—"now kissing their wives—now smacking their lips—now eating their dinner—and now going without—now snoring asleep—now yelling awake"—and so on in the same strain for ever, with equal appositeness and with equal propriety.

We will select from this first book besides, a sentence which contains a curious specimen of the metamorphosis of poetic beauty into prosaic nonsense. It occurs in a laboured parallel between Alaric (!) and De Soto, who should henceforth be doubtless considered notables in the history of Georgia.

"Like Alaric, who ravaged the Roman empire, De Soto came from a far country to waste and to destroy. The one poured his barbarian hordes from

\* Page 44.

the Alpine hills\* over the plains and valleys of Italy; the other, crossing the Atlantic with *destruction at his prow, and terror at his helm*, desolated the fairest portions of the sunny South.”†

Every one remembers the charming lines of Gray:—

“ Fair laughs the morn, and soft the zephyr blows,  
While proudly riding o’er the azure realm  
In gallant trim the gilded vessel goes;  
*Youth on the prow, and Pleasure at the helm.*”

Doctor Stevens has borrowed the poet’s beautiful line, and marred it in the borrowing. He has served it, to use Sheridan’s expression, “as gypsies do stolen children, disfiguring them to make ’em pass for their own.” In the verses we have quoted, *prow* and *helm* refer to a ship—“the gilded vessel.” In our author’s paragraph, they either mean the *prow* and *helm* of the *man*—Ferdinand de Soto— or else must be turned adrift without any meaning at all. There is not a ship anywhere within sight of them.

If Doctor Stevens had been a Welshman, we might have supposed he meant by De Soto’s *prow*

\* The author probably means the Alps: which, as is well known, are among the loftiest mountains in Europe.

† Page 25.

—his *brow*; *helm* being a poetical form for *helmet*. As it now stands, the sentence certainly has no meaning in English.

The propriety of occupying fifty-five octavo pages of a history of Georgia in what is strangely enough called *Ante-colonial history*—that is, no history at all—is somewhat problematical. It is, nevertheless, no small proof of talent, that a man should be able to write fifty-five octavo pages of a State's *history*, before there was any State, and consequently before there was any history.

But this consideration evidently did not enter into the question. The object being to make a book, fifty-five octavo pages on any subject whatever were not to be disregarded.

One of the most striking peculiarities of this book is the talent for *Amplification* it displays. True, not a single subject is made to appear more dignified or important; but—like stretched India rubber—tenuity of substance increases in exact proportion to extension of surface; and the sense is often lost in diffuseness of phraseology.

When tea is over diluted, the mixture is called *slop*; and when little sense is dressed up in very many and very big words, the composition is called *twaddle*. Thus twaddle is a sort of literary slop.

But they differ in this—that slop is apt to produce repletion before satiety; while with twaddle, satiety precedes repletion. Or to state it less abstractly,—a man may, on occasion, drink slop till he can hold no more, without being satiated; but that a man should not get enough of Doctor Stevens's history of Georgia, before he gets to the end of it, we conceive to be impossible.

The ship which brought the first colonists to Georgia, sailed from England, November 17th, 1732, and arrived at Charleston, January 13th, 1733. This is a plain statement of a plain fact. It is, moreover, all that is known about that fact. But it makes only one brief sentence; and nothing less than half a page would suit our author. If such a chance for amplification was neglected, how was a bulky octavo to be eked out, price two dollars and fifty cents? So he tells us that a ship's progress at sea is not measured by milestones!—in other words, that a ship does not sail on a turnpike road!—and more to the same purpose.

“The ship sailed the next day, November 17th, 1732, from Gravesend, skirted slowly along the southern coast of England, and, taking its departure from Scilly light, *spread out its white sails to the breezes of the Atlantic.*

“*Day after day, and week after week, the voyagers*

*seem the centre of the same watery circle, canopied by the same bending sky. NO MILESTONES TELL OF THEIR PROGRESS. THE WAYMARKS OF THE MARINER ARE THE SUN BY DAY, AND THE MOON AND STARS BY NIGHT; no kindred ship answers back its red-cross signal; but there they float, the germ of a future nation, upon the desert waters. Sailing a circuitous route, they did not reach the coast of America until the 13th of January, 1733, when they cast anchor in Rebellion Roads, and furled their sails at last in the harbour of Charleston.”\**

The sails appear to have changed owners during the voyage. When it commenced, we are told they belonged to the *ship*; and now, at its end, to the *passengers*.

There is about this book a queer originality—a characteristic perfectly unique. What it states untruly, is absurdly untrue; and even what it states truly, is absurdly true. Witness those milestones.

One more specimen must suffice. The author wishes to apprise us of the fact that in the first Synagogue established in Savannah, religious service was performed *in Hebrew*. Two words express the idea, but two words go but a small way to make an octavo. Amplification is, therefore, as usual resorted to; and an inflated periphrasis is produced,

\* Page 87.

extending over *five lines*. This, to be sure, does not increase the volume much: but it increases it far more than two words would have done. And then—the ocean is made up of drops.

“True to their ancient faith, and zealous for the worship of the ‘God of Israel,’ they no sooner landed on our shores\* than they resolved to open a synagogue, to which they gave the name of Mickva Israel. A *room* was obtained and fitted up for the purpose . . . . In this temporary *house*† of God, divine service was regularly performed, *and the great ‘I AM’ was worshipped in the same language in which Abraham, Isaac and Jacob prayed; which was heard on Sinai, and in the gorgeous Temple of Solomon; and in which the inspired men of God poured forth their sublime and far-seeing prophecies.*”‡

We meet frequently—indeed, one can hardly open the book without finding—such phrases as these: “Their *wars* were seldom fair-fought *fields* ;”§ “The earth has been almost *girdled with the love-feasts* of his disciples”||—a sort of girdle, by the way, somewhat more wonderful than even the celebrated cestus of Venus—“Let us not *spread* on the grave page of

\* Query—what shores does the author mean? The shores of Massachusetts, or the shores of Georgia? Pennsylvania has no shores.

† This sudden metamorphosis of a room into a house is certainly as remarkable an event as any in the Hebrew history.

‡ Pages 368, 369.

§ Page 58.

|| Page 342.



history *the juvenile follies* of those two noble States."\* This spreading of juvenile follies after the manner of a plaster, is rather a novel mode of treating "the grave page of history;" but it reminds us very pleasantly of the Doctor's original vocation; or, as the vulgar saying hath it, it smells of the shop. "Before marriage great *looseness of virtue* prevailed."† Is Doctor Stevens really ignorant, that a *loose* woman is not a *virtuous* woman? that *looseness* is the very *reverse* of *virtue*?

But it would be tedious to detail the manifold blunders of every kind which pervade the book—vulgar colloquialisms, such as, "Where have they gone?"‡ for *whither*—errors in grammar—errors in the use of words. They are so frequent, that it is scarcely hyperbolic to say, that to enumerate them all would be nearly equivalent to reprinting the book.

We are next to notice Doctor Stevens's misstatements, and mistakes in regard to facts—some of them, of common historical notoriety. A few examples will be sufficient; and the inference from them seems unavoidable. If an author misstates facts so notorious as these—facts which ought to be as familiar to a man of letters as household words—what security have we that his other assertions are not

\* Page 139.

† Page 53.

‡ Page 28.

equally erroneous? and how is it possible to esteem his work as an authority?\*

On one of the first pages, under the title of ERRATA, the author exonerates the printer from all mistakes affecting *meaning*, (except one, which we have not noticed,) thereby assuming for himself the responsibility for the statements in the text. We mention this to prevent any suspicion of the errors being typographical.

“The treaty of Utrecht,” says Doctor Stevens, “in 1711” † There is many a little schoolgirl who could have told him that this famous treaty was made in 1713.

He informs us that by the convention of the 14th of January, 1739, between Great Britain and Spain, “it was declared with regard to the disputed territories of Great Britain and Spain, in Georgia, that things shall remain in the situation they are in at present, without increasing the fortifications there, or making any new post.” ‡ Now the stipulation really was, “that within six weeks two plenipotentiaries from each side should meet at Madrid, to regulate the pretensions of the two Crowns, as to rights of

\* We wish it to be distinctly understood, that we do not give a *list* of errors, but only a few specimens:—such as present themselves on a cursory perusal.

† Page 286.

‡ Page 160.

trade, and as to the limits of Georgia and Florida; that their conferences should finish within eight months; and that *in the meantime* no progress should be made in the fortifications of either province.\*

This is clearly a very different view of the case from that presented by Doctor Stevens; but the convention was concluded during the administration of Walpole, whose pacific policy, strangely enough, does not seem to meet with this Reverend person's approbation. It is doubtless very interesting to the public to know that Doctor Stevens thinks Sir Robert Walpole a "*splendid ministerial paradox*!" †

Doctor Stevens speaks of the treaty of Seville as having been concluded in 1730. ‡ It was concluded in 1729.

He says that "the forces of England under Vernon and Wentworth were aiming at the reduction of Havana," § during the war with Spain. The fact is, that they attacked Carthagená in 1741, and landed in Cuba, with a view of reducing *Santiago*, in July, 1742, but neither threatened nor attacked Havana.

He tells us that war was declared by Great Britain against Spain, on the 22d of October, 1739. || It was declared on the 19th of October.

He informs us that Oglethorpe was born on the

\* See Mahon. Hist. of England, vol. ii. pp. 409, 410.

† Page 208.

‡ Page 159.

§ Page 181.

|| Page 161.

21st of December, at a country-seat bought by his father, Sir Theophilus, *after* a visit to “the exiled king,” James the Second, at Saint Germain.\* Now James, so far from being *at Saint Germain* before the 21st of December, was at that time *still in England*, at Rochester.

He asserts, that on the committee appointed by the House of Commons, in 1728, to inquire into the state of the English gaols, were “some of the first men in England; among them . . . Admiral Vernon, and Field-Marshal Wade.”† Now Vernon was not an Admiral until 1739, nor Wade a Field-Marshal until 1745.

He says that Colonel Palmer and his troops were *dreadfully surprised* at Fort Moosa, during the siege of St. Augustine.‡ Mr. Spalding, whose authority is conclusive on the subject, in his *Life of Oglethorpe*, says expressly—“*They were NOT surprised.*”§

We next meet with a most extraordinary statement of a still more remarkable fact—a fact, too, which has had the strange fortune of escaping not only the investigations of historians, but the observation of contemporaries,—to be brought to light in the year of our Lord 1847, in the *History of Georgia*, by the learned researches of the Reverend William Bacon Stevens, M. D., Professor of Belles Lettres, *History(!)*, etc., in

\* Pages 76, 77.

† Page 60.

‡ Page 178.

§ Collections of the Geo. Hist. Society, vol. i. p. 281.

the University of Georgia:—since, emigrated homewards.

Oglethorpe's "first effort in the British Senate was in 1723, against the motion for the banishment of Francis Atterbury, Bishop of Rochester. *The bishop, on the death of Queen Anne, had, in full canonicals, and in the city of London, proclaimed CHARLES Stuart, King of Great Britain*" !!!\*

If this latter sentence is introduced in this connexion for any purpose at all, it must be to assign a reason for the Bishop's impeachment; to state the crime of which he was accused. In other words, the author wishes us to believe, that a man who publicly, "in full canonicals, and in the city of London," proclaimed the Pretender, King of Great Britain, in 1714, was not arraigned for such a glaring offence until 1723—*nine years afterwards*: this very man, too, being allowed in the mean time to *officiate conspicuously at the Coronation of George the First*,† and to hold the distinguished stations of Bishop of Rochester and Dean of Westminster unmolested!

Every one who has the slightest acquaintance with the history of those times, is aware that Atterbury was really charged with "carrying on a traitorous

\* Page 82.

† As Dean of Westminster. See Lodge, *Illust. Pers. folio*, vol. iv. art. Atterbury.

correspondence, in order to raise an insurrection in the kingdom, and to procure foreign Princes to invade it."

But further: we are told in this astonishing paragraph that the Bishop "proclaimed CHARLES Stuart, King of Great Britain"! Is it possible that a "*Professor of Belles Lettres, and History,*" does not know what it would disgrace any *Freshman* to be ignorant of—that the Pretender's name was JAMES?—and that his son, the young Pretender, with whom alone even the grossest carelessness could confound him, was not born till six years after this alleged proclamation of Atterbury's?

This *event*, now first published to the world by Doctor Stevens, *never took place!* We will however give, in the words of Lord Mahon, the report upon which Doctor Stevens probably based his fabrication.

"We are, indeed, assured that Atterbury, immediately on the Queen's demise, PROPOSED to *Bolingbroke* to ATTEMPT proclaiming James at Charing Cross; and offered himself to head the procession in his lawn sleeves. But Bolingbroke, shrinking from an enterprise so desperate, with the majority of the Council and the Executive Government against them, the Bishop is said to have exclaimed, with an oath, 'There is the best cause in Europe lost for want of spirit!'"\*

\* Hist. of England, vol. i. p. 138.

But lest this should prove insufficient to convince his readers of the extent of his ignorance, he lugs in the unfortunate House of Stuart again a second time, and succeeds, if possible, in outblundering himself.

“On the declaration of war,” he writes, “with England by France, (March 4th, 1744,) and the threatened invasion of England by a large force under Count Saxe, for the purpose of enforcing the claims to the throne of the *Chevalier de St. George, eldest son of Charles Edward,*” &c.\*

Thus he makes a man his own son, or else his own grandfather!

Chevalier St. George was the incognito title of both the old Pretender, James, and his son, Charles Edward, the young Pretender. Charles Edward was not married until 1772, and, as is well known, left no son; much less one who had claims to the throne in 1744!

We venture to say that these blunders evince a degree of ignorance, to which historical literature cannot furnish a parallel.

That a man who pretends to the character of a scholar—a Professor, moreover, of Belles Lettres, and History—should be so excessively ignorant of common English history, is rather a singular circumstance in itself: but that he should choose the History of Georgia to make an ostentatious display of that

\* Page 208.

ignorance, is indeed amazing. And it would be almost inexplicable to one who was not acquainted with this heterogeneous and grotesque medley of gleanings—a History in name, in reality a Common-place book.

We have often met with ignorance; but never before with ignorance that voluntarily obtruded itself upon public notice, or that thrust forth its nakedness with such marvellous effrontery.

Upon the whole, then, the review of Doctor Stevens's work, leads we think to two inevitable conclusions:

First.—That he cannot write History.

Second.—That he cannot write English.

But we have compassion upon his inexperience; and shall therefore repeat some advice, which he would do well to profit by.

“Whenever you have written anything which you think particularly fine—strike it out.”

Observance of this advice will certainly diminish the bulk of his volumes, and cannot diminish their value.





# A P P E N D I X .



## A P P E N D I X.

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“THE course which the Society ought to have adopted, appears to us quite clear. The first years of its existence, and the first fruits of its income should have been exclusively devoted to the collection of original materials. When these had become sufficiently numerous to afford a selection—based upon a comparison of their relative value—the most interesting and important among the official and other *Manuscripts*, should have been chosen for publication.

“Such a volume, composed of authentic and previously inaccessible documents, would indeed have been a precious addition to our historical literature.

“This kind of material having been exhausted, the publication funds might next have been employed in reprinting a few of the rarest and most curious of the early tracts relating to the colony, in chronological order; and an imitation of the style of typography and general ‘getting up’ which distinguish

Mr. Force's valuable reprint of *Historical Tracts*, would certainly have given no cause for impeaching the Society's good taste.

"Essays in elucidation of particular parts of our history should have been invited, encouraged, and, when well executed, published among the collections.

"At length, when the library had become complete in materials—manuscript and printed—when the attention of our citizens had been attracted, and their interest excited in the subject—when the talents of many of them had been employed in these essays upon it, some one should have *then* been appointed to digest these copious materials in one historical work.

"The Society's action has been the reverse of this: it has begun where it should have ended."

*Extract from an Article on the COLLECTIONS OF THE  
GEORGIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, in Augusta Con-  
stitutionalist, August 21st, 1849.*



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